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(57) Abstract

A family of cDNA sequences derived from hepatitis C virus (HCV) are provided. These sequences encode antigens which react immunologically with antibodies present in individuals with non-A non-B hepatitis (NANBH), but which generally are absent from individuals infected with hepatitis A virus (HAV) or hepatitis B virus (HBV), and also are absent from control individuals. A comparison of these cDNA sequences with the sequences in Genebank, and with the sequences of hepatitis delta virus (HDV) and HBV shows a lack of substantial homology. A comparison of the sequences of amino acids encoded in the cDNA with the sequences of Flaviviruses indicates that HCV is a Flavivirus or Flavi-like virus. The HCV cDNA sequences are useful for the design of polynucleotide probes, and for the synthesis of polypeptides which may be used in immunoassays. Both the polynucleotide probes and the polypeptides may be useful for the diagnosis of HCV-induced NANBH, and for screening blood bank specimens and donors for HCV infection. In addition, these cDNA sequences may be useful for the synthesis of immunogenic polypeptides which may be used in vaccines for the treatment, prophylactic and/or therapeutic, of HCV infection. Polypeptides encoded within the cDNA sequences may also be used to raise antibodies against HCV antigenes, and for the purification of antibodies directed against HCV antigenes. These antibodies may be useful in immunoassays for detecting HCV antigenes associated with NANBH in individuals, and in blood bank donations. Moreover, these antibodies may be used for treatment of NANBH in individuals. The reagents provided in the invention also enable the isolation of NANBH agent(s), and the propagation of these agent(s) in tissue culture systems. Moreover, they provide reagents which are useful for screening for antiviral agents for HCV, particularly in tissue culture or animal model systems.

carried out utilizing the PCR amplification procedure, as described in Section IV.C.3, except that the hybridization probe was a kinased oligonucleotide derived from the clone 81 cDNA sequence. The results showed that the amplified sequences hybridized with the clone 81 derived HCV cDNA probe.

IV.H.3. Homology Between the Non-Structural Protein of Dengue Flavivirus (MNWWVD1) and the HCV Polypeptides Encoded by the Combined ORF of Clones 14i Through 39c

The combined HCV cDNAs of clones 14i through 39c contain one continuous ORF, as shown in Fig. 26. The polypeptide encoded therein was analyzed for sequence homology with the region of the non-structural polypeptide(s) in Dengue flavivirus (MNWVD1). The analysis used the Dayhoff protein data base, and was performed on a computer. The results are shown in Fig. 42, where the symbol (:) indicates an exact homology, and the symbol (.) indicates a conservative replacement in the sequence; the dashes indicate spaces inserted into the sequence to achieve the greatest homologies. As seen from the figure, there is significant homology between the sequence encoded in the HCV cDNA, and the non-structural polypeptide(s) of Dengue virus. In addition to the homology shown in Fig. 42, analysis of the polypeptide segment encoded in a region towards the 3'-end of the cDNA also contained sequences which are homologous to sequences in the Dengue polymerase. Of consequence is the finding that the canonical Gly-Asp-Asp (GDD) sequence thought to be essential for RNA-dependent RNA polymerases is contained in the polypeptide encoded in HCV cDNA, in a location which is consistent with that in Dengue 2 virus. (Data not shown.)